

## SWITZERLAND

*By David Knopf  
Consultant geologist*

Switzerland is a federal republic with a bicameral Federal Assembly, the members of which are elected for four-year terms by popular vote on the basis of proportional representation. The executive authority is vested in the Federal Council, which presides over the seven Federal Departments (Ministries). It operates by the collegiate system. The Swiss in recent years have brought their legal and economic practices largely into conformity with the EU's, although they are not pursuing full EU membership in the near term.

Switzerland is a prosperous and stable modern market economy country. However, it has to rely heavily on the outside world for economic survival. Switzerland's natural resources are poor, and the mining industry is almost non-existent. Without taking into account gravel, sand and clay, Swiss domestic mineral production is limited to cement (3.6 Mt/y), gypsum (300,000 t/y) and lime (30,000 t/y). The salt mining operations in the Rhine Valley and in the Alps produce 350,000 t/y and 50,000 t/y, respectively.

Aluminium (some 50,000 t/y), iron and steel are produced from imported raw materials, but these smelting activities are being phased out.

Some 14 Mt of petroleum is imported annually and covers more than 70% of the primary energy needs: alternative resources are being investigated with the assistance of the federal government.

In the mineral sector, no exploration activity was recorded. However, a gold property in the Medel community of Graubünden canton was kept in good order, whereas the gold properties in the Disentis area were allowed to lapse.